Carrot Replaces Stick For Minor Offenders

By VennerRoad, 2nd Feb 2015

The Government is tackling the problem of recidivism, in particular petty offenders.

Justice Secretary Chris Grayling has unveiled a new scheme to cut down on reoffending by short sentence prisoners. Actually, although the implementation is new, he announced it and other measures way back in November 2012. Grayling wants any prisoner who has been sentenced to less than a year to be supervised on release for the following 12 months. No reasonable person could object to this, but his taking said supervision out of the hands of probation officers and giving it to the private sector has raised hackles with the usual suspects. The Howard League For Penal Reform is not happy, for one.

Chris Grayling

Grayling's heart is in the right place, so is his head, but is he going far enough? Prisoners are at the bottom of the food chain, and most elicit little sympathy for their predicament, whatever crime they have committed. Long term prisoners, lifers especially who are considered suitable for release, are given proper support, but for a man who has served even a six month sentence, release can be a disaster if he doesn't know how to cope, or if he finds himself homeless. A prisoner who has a home to go to may not be in bad shape, but if he does not, and has only the clothes on his back with perhaps a few possessions in a plastic bag, what is likely to happen to him?

In addition to this, a man (or woman) who does not have a trade is likely to end up in desperate straits. And of course, a criminal record for either violence or dishonesty if not both is apt to send a man to the back of a very long queue for the few jobs that are available in this era of manufactured austerity. For women there is often another (unpleasant) option, while they are of a certain age or until their looks fade, but many men end up doing a life sentence on the installment plan, if they haven't already fallen into the downward spiral of prison, homelessness, petty crime, prison, homelessness, petty crime...

Will this new approach work? Time will tell. There is already some help available for prisoners on discharge: *The Prisoner Funder Directory 2013* can be downloaded from the website of *Inside Time*.

One option neither Chris Grayling nor any other member of either the Coalition Government or the Opposition is likely to consider is Basic Income; you can read about that here.

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